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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2007

In Today's Papers

Turkish Presidential Debates

All papers continue reporting and speculation on whether the AKP government can persuade enough lawmakers to participate in the first round of voting of the presidential election in parliament set for Friday. The main opposition CHP has already announced they will boycott the voting and threatened to apply to the Constitutional Court to rule the election invalid if less than two thirds of the 550 lawmakers (367) are in the parliament for the first round. The only presidential nominee, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, needs the support of 14 MPs outside AKP to secure the presence of 367 deputies in the first round. The AKP maintains that only 184 deputies need be present to hold the first round of voting. Asked yesterday by reporters what would happen in case the high court annuls the first vote, Gul said early parliamentary elections will be called. Opposition parties Anavatan and DYP urged the AKP to put off the presidential election and call early general elections instead. Vatan says the two parties have decided not to participate in the voting unless the government calls for early polls. Prime Minister Erdogan ruled out postponing the presidential vote and the calls for early elections.

Gul said following his contacts with the independent MPs in the parliament that he will be true to the values of the secular republic in deeds as well as in words. Gul stressed he has three aims, "a strong democracy, a strong economy and a strong army in Turkey."

Turkey's influential business gathering TUSIAD and labor union Turk-Is have welcomed Gul's candidacy. The Turkish stock exchanges reacted positively to the nomination of Gul. Economic/political daily Dunya says up to USD 25 billion could come to Turkey in 2007 if the presidential election process is completed smoothly.

Editorial Commentary on Presidential Process

Cuneyt Ulsever writes in the mainstream Hurriyet: "The presidential

election process proved that the key players of Turkey not only failed to observe democratic rules but also that they demonstrated a serious lack of vision. Neither the ruling AKP, nor the main opposition CHP has a vision. AKP voters should be upset because they are shaping policy depending on the circumstance, rather than a solid party strategy. As for the secular masses, they should be upset too due to the fact that a staunch advocate of the headscarf is about to occupy presidency. Turkey seems to be a country of people with no vision."

Fehmi Kuru comments in the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak: "If the CHP takes the presidential election issue to the Constitutional Court, Turkey, no matter what, will end up in a crisis. Interestingly enough, the opposition circles prefer to put the country into a crisis rather than support a moderate figure for the presidency. It just does not make sense that Turkey's main opposition party would boycott the voting session for the presidency and advocate for a crisis. But this is politics after all; politicians are known to act in a suicidal fashion from time to time. The parliamentary session tomorrow is very critical."

Larijani-Solana Meet in Ankara

All papers report EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana and Iranian Chief Nuclear Negotiator Ali Larijani came together in Ankara to discuss Tehran's nuclear program. Larijani and Solana said they held "positive" discussions, adding they plan to meet again within two weeks. Before the Larijani-Solana meeting, Prime Minister Erdogan came together at lunch with Larijani who is scheduled to meet with Turkish National Security Council (MGK) Secretary-General Yigit Alpogun on Thursday. Sabah reports President Bush said Secretary Rice and the Iranian FM might hold bilateral talks at the

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upcoming Iraq neighbors conference in Egypt.

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Editorial Commentary on Turkey's Diplomacy

Sami Kohen observes in the mainstream Milliyet: "Turkish diplomacy succeeded in making three important meetings happen in Ankara. Iranian representative Larijani started a series of meetings with the EU official Solana. The Iraqi Foreign Minister is also arriving in Ankara for discussions about the upcoming Iraqi conference in Egypt. And, the leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan are expected to meet in Ankara next Monday. These meetings are the clear indication that Turkey is a regional actor in diplomacy. Iran-EU talks occurred when the nuclear issue seemed to be frozen due to uncompromising statements of Iran. Despite this fact, the Larijani-Solana meeting has the potential to initiate a new negotiation process. As for the upcoming Iraqi conference, the Iraqi Foreign Minister is apparently planning to conquer Ankara's heart after the disappointment over the fact that Iraq did not want Turkey to be the host for this conference. If the Egypt conference produces some progress, a new phase might begin and Turkey can be the host for the next conference."

Assassination Attempt on Education Board Chairman

All papers report a gunman attempted to enter the office of Professor Erdogan Tezic chairman of Turkey's secularist Higher Education Board (YOK) on Wednesday, in an attempt to assassinate him. When he was prevented from entering the building, the gunman fired three shots at the security guards and fled. The assailant, Nurullah Ilgun, was captured in a bus station a few hours later. Mainstream Hurriyet reports Ilgun was a supporter of the nationalist-Islamist party BBP, adding his sister, wearing the Islamic-style headscarf, had problems in university.

The attempted attack comes a day after the ruling AKP announced Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as their presidential candidate. Tezic has been highly critical of the ruling AK Party's policies and opposed Erdogan seeking the presidency.

MFA on Bush's Armenian Remembrance Day Message

Radikal and Cumhuriyet report the Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) said in a statement it was "impossible to agree with certain points in the statement" of President Bush on April 24 Armenian Remembrance

Day message. The MFA statement, however, noted "President Bush emphasized that an open study of the historical events of the last period of the Ottoman Empire will help the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia. We agree with President Bush on this matter, and expect that the US President and the Administration will continue to encourage Armenia to give a positive response to our historic offer."

TV Highlights
NTV, 6.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- A cabinet reshuffle is expected in Ankara following presidential elections. Foreign Minister Gul is to be replaced by State Minister Ali Babacan whose post will be given to AKP deputy chairman Reha Denemec or Nazim Ekren.
- 400 NGOs back a rally planned in Istanbul on Sunday to voice support for the basic values of the republic.
- Police detained Wednesday in Istanbul six members of the PKK, including a blind woman, seizing more than 6.7 kg of plastic explosives and a bomb vest with a detonator on it. The terrorists were reportedly preparing for a "sensational" bomb attack.
- President Sezer will host talks between Pakistan and Afghan presidents Musharraf and Karzai on April 29-30 to cool tensions over cross-border militancy in Afghanistan.

International News

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- The Turkish Jewish congregation and four other leading Jewish organizations in the US have sent a letter to the US Congress urging postponing Armenian genocide debates.
- A UN report said journalists in Iraq's Kurdistan face arrest and harassment over reporting on government corruption and poor public services.
- Radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr called for demonstrations against the wall around a Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad, saying it displayed the "evil intentions" of American "occupiers."
- A senior US intelligence official said Fidel Castro's health is improving and the 80-year-old leader is likely to take full command again.

WILSON